

To imagine that such a young man, only twenty-five years old, could have made such a noble contribution towards the liberation of our people at a time when our organised revolutionary struggle was only beginning to take roots! It sounds incredible yet very true. What the life of Johannes Nkosi demonstrates is that all of us can contribute to our people's struggle to the best of our abilities no matter how young we may be, as long as we are determined and have patience to learn from our elders. There is a bit of Johannes Nkosi in each and everyone of us. And we are even fortunate in that we are living at a time when we can practically see freedom over the horizon.

Our time demands revolutionaries of Johannes Nkosi's calibre. Our long suffering people and the entire freedom-loving people in the world expect much from us - the liberation of our Motherland. This is a great challenge but one that can be achieved in our life-time. Our urgent task is to give all for the realisation of the lofty ideals for which Johannes Nkosi and all our heroes readily laid down their lives.

'They Killed Old Manku'

- LERATO MORENA

I don't remember old Manku when I was a little boy, though she had been living hardly a stone's throw from my own home - a matchbox like all the others. Now at the age of 16, I knew her fairly well. There were many stories about the reason for her plumpness. Some said she was living on the savings of her late husband who was reputed to have been excellent at betting horses, whilst others were almost certain that she was a witch. "Don't you see how even the dogs avoid her dustbin," they would add with great agitation. This was basically township gossip and those who took it seriously were very few if any. All this did not seem to affect old Manku and she continued with her silent ways, leading an unimprovable and definitely uninteresting life.

A KIND-HEARTED SOUL

No doubt some of the old folks knew her well. They would never go past her house without inquiring about her health and wishing her luck. Luck in what? Nobody knew and I did not bother myself about it either. One thing certain about Manku was that she was a hard worker. She really knew how to carry her weight about.

The first time I entered her house was when her two grandsons came home from boarding school on holidays and I, having been per chance not very far from where they alighted from the taxi, was assisting them with the luggage. Five minutes later I was standing right inside her kitchen greatly struck by the spotlessly clean state of this apology for a kitchen. I stood there bewildered, never able to comprehend how she managed to keep it that clean, and a matchbox house for that matter.

I did not stand long that way for Manku, like Mt Vesuvius rolling forward, was edging herself towards me from the door on my right, wearing the broadest smile. I was dumbfounded. She immediately shook my unsteady hand, inquired about my family, my school results, etc. And all the time she was saying to me "That's a good boy! I think you'll make a great patriot." She went on ignoring my request for permission to leave. "Sixteen years of age, that's great. A few more years and you'll be big enough to follow in the footsteps of the volunteers". Though I did not understand this part of her oration, one thing was clear to me now; Old Manku was a kind-hearted soul and seemed to care about everyone. This was the beginning of an acquaintance that was to be short-lived.

When schools re-opened, her grandsons having gone back to school, I frequently went on several little errands for Manku. They were very simple: "Son take this small package and drop it at Dlamini's," and I would shoot out like a bullet on my errand. There were several packages I sent to Dlamini and other people, surprisingly much younger people, in this way. "That's a good boy! A patriot you'll make" and a gentle pat on the back. I never got to decipher this seemingly idiomatic expression for a very long time. Perhaps because it was said by old Manku whom everybody knew was jobless, plump and suspicious. She was even arrested on quite a few occasions. Once when she threatened the township superintendent with her umbrella. All these did not bother me now. I told myself it was inquisitiveness that led to my acquaintance with the old woman, but inwardly I involuntarily admitted that she was a kind-hearted soul. I would frequently repeat this

to myself in order to suppress the other thought.

ONE SATURDAY AFTERNOON...

The incident that led to my better understanding of the old woman occurred one Saturday afternoon. It was towards month end and there was general excitement in the township. I had heard the previous day at school that there was going to be an anti-rent demonstration. At 14,30 the area around the



rent office was already fuming with agitation. The little crowd that had been gathering there since morning was growing every minute. They were singing and shouting. Few seized the opportunity to hurl angry insults at the white township superintendent whom they did notice had hurriedly ejected himself through the backdoor of the office, past the toilets to a waiting police van at the other side of the street. I drew nearer to the scene. "We are never going to pay. Where the hell do they think we get the money from? These are hardly houses, they are hovels. To pay that much for hovels? Never! We hardly have enough to eat. It is just a miracle how we survive and now they want us to pay R22,00 for these hovels. Good people on our knees never!" Manku was perfectly at ease with herself as though she had rehearsed her oration for months. Her sonorous voice held the crowd spell-bound. They interrupted her speech with applause and shouts of "Amandla!" I could not believe my ears. Was this really old Manku? "That's a good boy... A good patriot you'll make", I unexpectedly re-called the epilogue of my last visit to her house. Shouts of "Tell them" escaped through my mouth. Nobody seemed to hear or notice me for suddenly something seem-

ed to have captured the eyes of the small crowd.

Everybody saw and knew what it was. The small column of cars - mostly vans, pulled to a stop opposite the rent office. The police rushed out like mad bulls. For a split second they really did look like bulls and the crowd, the matadors. "On our knees never" I fancied I heard the voice of old Manku as I scurried and ducked amidst swinging truncheons that were targeting at anybody within reach. I ran away. By a miracle I emerged clear out of that bloody pandemonium. "The scum, this is the treatment they've given us for ages. The scum!" One old man who had ducked behind the abandoned bus-stop shed was cursing, hardly noticing my presence three metres away from him.

One woman came screaming down the street, "They've killed old Manku, the brats! Smashed her skull with a truncheon, these devils!" I felt a lump in my throat and suddenly my legs refused to carry me. I struggled to reach home. Mother was already home and as she opened the door for me, I paused and almost in a whisper reported to her; "They killed old Manku." She let out some kind of suppressed scream, cursed, took me into her arms and together we cried for a full minute.

That evening the streets were deserted as the people were indoors, mourning the death of Manku. Those who were still shocked by the conduct of Manku that afternoon were told that she was brought to our township from the Vaal areas where she was very active in trade unions and in the general fight against oppression. The government labelled her an 'agitator' and banned her. Only then did they begin to understand. And they even had reason to believe that all the rumours about her were hatched by the police - to keep people away from the so-called agitator. Most people agreed that Manku was a heroine. The enemy used dirty slander on her but could never dampen her spirit.
